

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Connecticut  
Before the Judiciary Committee  
April 5, 2013**

**IN SUPPORT OF  
HB 6682: AAC COLLABORATION BETWEEN BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND LAW  
ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL**

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Sara Frankel and I am the Public Policy Director for Children, Youth and Young Adults with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental illness. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for improved services, more humane treatment and an end to stigma and economic and social discrimination. We represent individuals who actually live with mental illness and parents and family members of individuals living with mental illness. I am here today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to support HB 6682, *An Act Concerning Collaboration Between Boards of Education and Law Enforcement Personnel*.

The presence of police officers in schools (known as School Resource Officers) has greatly increased the number of student arrests in Connecticut, the majority of which are not for serious or violent offenses. Rather, these arrests occur for low-level, non-violent offenses, such as breach of peace and disorderly conduct which in many cases are the result of unmet behavioral and mental health needs. Therefore, it is necessary for schools and police to collaborate and develop a written formal agreement, as HB 6682 requires, to detail the roles and responsibilities of police stationed in schools.

Many of the behaviors exhibited by children that lead to school-based arrests are often the result of unmet behavioral and mental health needs. It is widely recognized that twenty percent of all children have a diagnosable mental health condition. Drop-out rates among students classified as Emotionally Disturbed (ED) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are alarmingly high, over 50%. Additionally, 65-70% of youth in juvenile detention have a diagnosable behavioral health condition. Rather than pushing children out of

school for problem behaviors, we must work towards creating a positive school climate for learning and social development so that every child has an opportunity for success.

In order to reduce the number of arrests in school of children with problem behaviors, a memorandum of agreement (MOA) should exist between the district and the police department that outlines roles and responsibilities, and school and police personnel should be regularly oriented to its implementation. We would recommend that such MOAs reference school climate plans and would also recommend that such school climate plans include school-wide positive behavior supports which are evidenced-based practices that increase student learning and simultaneously address problem behaviors through positive reinforcement.<sup>1</sup>

We also support the use of the model MOA developed by the state's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, within the Office of Policy and Management, together with educators, police and others. This model includes a "graduated response model" that clarifies what misbehaviors should be handled (A) by teachers in classrooms, (B) with administrators, (C) with personnel like social workers, and finally, only in serious cases, (D) with law enforcement. National experts, like those at the National Juvenile Justice Network have recommended this approach, and Connecticut communities using it have seen remarkable decreases in arrests without compromising safety.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Frankel, JD  
*Public Policy Director – Children, Youth and Young Adults*  
NAMI Connecticut

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<sup>1</sup> *Bazelon Center Backs Evidence-Based Alternatives to Increased Law Enforcement in Our Nation's Schools*, Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, (March 28, 2013).